THE *SUNDAY TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR
OF *RAMADAN REFLECTIONS*



The Power of Du'a

'Empowering...of great benefit to those who want their doors flung open by Allah'
Mufti Menk

Aliyah Umm Raiyaan

The Power of Du'a

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For my dearest readers, I make this du'a for you: May this book be a means of you turning to Allah in du'a and, in turn, Him Turning Lovingly and Mercifully towards you. Ameen.

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Introduction

Dearest reader, although your eyes are reading these words, I ask that you grant me your heart's attention. You may be wondering why I have started this introduction with 'Dearest reader'. Whether I know you or not, it is because introductions are everything, as you will come to see. I want you to understand that you are a reader who is dear to me, regardless of our differences in gender, race, age and even religion. You are dear to me because you and I are more similar than you realise. How? Because we are trying to make sense of this journey called life, and we're doing the best that we can to navigate our way through.

Sometimes it's easy. And sometimes it can be hard – really hard. There are challenges to overcome. There are goals to achieve. There is pain and there is ease. There is darkness and light. There are moments when we feel weak and there are moments when we feel so strong that we can take on the world. And this is why I address you as 'dearest reader', now and throughout this entire book. Because I know, I understand and I journey with you.

I am a writer who wishes to walk by your side as you discover the treasures that await you through the practice of du'a – personal supplication that is so much more than just personal prayer. There are dimensions and depths to du'a that lead a soul to transform, the scales in the next life to tip massively in favour of ajr (reward) and the soul to relax in profound feelings of belonging, as your heart feels at home, settling in closeness to Allah, subhanahu wa ta'ala – Glorious and Most High is He.

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Dear reader, as you read this book, expect depth and

compassion, and to discover a fresh meaning to personal supplication to the Lord of the Worlds. Expect the possibility of transformation in yourself, ease in your difficulties, dreams that become reality and a spiritually deeper relationship with Him ('azza wa jal – Glory be to Him).

The Power of Du'a is a powerful yet compassionate framework designed to introduce you to du'a as never before. To transform your du'a – showing you how and why du'a needs to be an absolute priority in your life. Divided into four parts, *The Power of Du'a* takes you on a journey of preparation of your heart before you make du'a, of the refinement of what to say and how you say it as you call upon Him ('azza wa jal) and of training yourself to trust in the best response of Allah (subhanahu wa ta'ala) to your du'a.

In each chapter, I introduce you to the theme of that chapter, followed by a real-life du'a story about someone I know. I then take you by the hand and help you gently develop your du'a practice through understanding and guidance. And then, my dear reader, I extend an invitation, through practical steps, to take all that your heart and mind has learned and been moved by, and to apply this to your own du'a practice and life. For the practical elements of this book towards the end of each chapter, you may want to treat yourself to a lovely journal!

The 'Allah, Transform My Du'a' section at the very end of each chapter offers an example of a du'a to the Lord of the Heavens and the Earth, in which you beseech Him to help you transform your du'a. You may use this du'a as it is presented or tweak it to align with the changes you have already made or need to make to your own du'a practice.

Islamic terminology has been translated in the first instance and there is a glossary to help you at the end of the book. On your first reading of *The Power of Du'a*, I strongly encourage you to read the chapters in chronological order. This is because before you can speak to Allah, your heart must first speak. And before you can 'see' the answer to your du'a, you need to

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understand Who it is you are asking, and how He responds. Afterwards, on any subsequent reading, you may dip in and out as you please. But please trust me, this is a book to read in order first, to truly build upon your previous learnings. This means that by the end, you will have a full, comprehensive approach to preparing for du'a, making it, navigating the response and, I hope, living with it as your most powerful tool in this life.

In his book *Sayed Al-Khater*, the Islamic scholar Ibn al-Jawzi (may Allah be pleased with him) wrote:

> Some of the scholars used to remind people that the Prophet (ﷺ peace and blessings be upon him) said: 'Supplication is worship', and I say, 'Worship is supplication.'

I couldn't agree more. Du'a is the articulation of your needs, but through the Generosity of Allah, it becomes worship, leading you to great reward and a nearness to Him like no other. One of my favourite writers, the scholar Ibn al-Qayyim, penned something that I hope summarises your experience of du'a once you finish reading this book. In *Madaarij As-Salikeen*, he notes:

> It is possible that a person has a need for something, so he earnestly prays and requests Allah for it, until the sweetness of asking and imploring Allah is opened for him. So he enjoys being humbled before Him, and trying to draw closer to Him, using His Names and Attributes, and his heart becomes void of everything besides Him . . . So it is possible that what good has come about because of this state of his is even greater . . . than his actual need . . . to such an extent that he wishes to continue in this state, and prefers it over the actual fulfilment of his need.

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> So his happiness due to this state is greater than the happiness he would achieve had his need actually been fulfilled.

Dearest reader, by Allah, for Allah and with Allah, it is time to take what you need and want to your Lord and connect with Him ('azza wa jal) through du'a.

Aliyah Umm Raiyaan

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PART 1:

Du'a of Need and Want

Dear reader, there are moments in your life where you will find yourself at an all-time low, as a servant of Allah in need.

There are moments in your life where you will find yourself in a better place, where you can dream as a servant in want.

I invite you to embark upon the beginning of this journey of du'a discovery by introducing you to the One to whom you are making du'a.

I introduce you to du'a through knowing your Lord.

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1

Du'a is Relationship

Allah ('azza wa jal) says:

'If My servants ask you (O Muhammad) about Me; I am very close, answering the caller (who invokes Me).'

Surah Baqarah 2:186

In the midst of writing this book, I was blessed with the invitation to perform Umrah, the non-obligatory pilgrimage to Makkah, with my children. It was a very special trip as this would be the first time their eyes beheld the Kabah – the House of Allah situated in Islam's holiest site. We arrived in the holy city of Makkah, performed Umrah and remained in the blessed city for five nights. I hadn't booked the hotel for the next leg of our trip, the city of Madinah, as a family friend who ran a travel agency specialising in Umrah packages assured us he could secure a hotel booking at cost price. But as we neared the end of our time in Makkah, calls and messages to this family friend went unanswered. When we finally managed to get through to him, he informed us that he had not been able to reach his own contact at the hotel.

On our final night in Makkah, and with the train booked to take us to Madinah the next day, I began to panic. I felt

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frustrated and let down, as this booking should have been finalised weeks earlier. Adding to my rising panic, other hotels close to the Prophet Muhammad's Mosque, which is the sole reason pilgrims visit Madinah, were either fully booked or did not even answer their reservation lines!

As this was my children's first visit to Madinah, I wanted to provide them with the ease and luxury of staying in a hotel a stone's throw away from the Prophet's Mosque. I could feel angry tears form in my eyes and hastily voiced my frustration to my children. My daughter looked at me and said, 'Don't worry, Ummi. There's a reason for all of this. Allah will look after us and open up a way.'

Calm descended as I processed the words my soul needed to hear. I felt embarrassed that I hadn't had the instant tawakkul (reliance upon Allah) that my daughter had displayed. Straightening my slumped shoulders, I turned to my children and said, 'Allah will look after us! How can He not? The early Muslims left Makkah with nowhere to go for His Sake. Allah looked after them through the kindness and generosity of the Ansar (the supporters from Madinah). We're leaving Makkah and travelling to Madinah with nowhere to stay, and we are here in these blessed lands purely for His Sake. There is no way Allah will let us down.'

I then turned to Allah and made a silent du'a: 'Allah, I'm here for You. I want ease for my children. You are the same Lord who looked after the early Muslims who had nowhere to go. You are the same Lord who will provide for us. I place my trust in You. Provide us with a hotel that is close to the Prophet's (ﷺ peace and blessings be upon him) Mosque. I know and trust You will provide the absolute best for us.'

I decided to take to heart a lesson from an incident narrated by one of the companions of the Prophet (ﷺ), which states:

> Anas ibn Malik (may Allah be pleased with him) reported: a man said, 'O Messenger of Allah, should I tie

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> my camel and trust in Allah, or should I leave her untied and trust in Allah?' The Prophet (ﷺ) said: 'Tie her and trust in Allah.'
>
> *Sunan Tirmidhi*

And so, with our baggage stored securely in the luggage compartment, on the train to Madinah, we frantically began to 'tie our camel' and message friends, asking them if they knew of any hotels close to Masjid an-Nabawi – the Prophet's Mosque. They all came back saying everything was fully booked. We began to look at Airbnbs, roughly a twenty-minute walk from the Prophet's Mosque. In the forecast 46°C heat, I could not imagine us walking without shade to and from the mosque.

After a while, we were sent a link to a hotel that had space and which also fell within our budget. I googled the name, clicked on Maps and saw that it was a fifteen-minute walk from the mosque – five minutes fewer than to the Airbnbs. With only an hour to go until our arrival in Madinah, and fearful that the available rooms would be taken by someone else, I placed my trust in Allah and booked them. Despite the dreaded walk we would have to take in the sweltering heat, I felt an instant sense of relief that we would be okay.

Stepping out of the air-conditioned station at Madinah into the brutal afternoon sun, I started to feel anxious again about how we were going to manage the numerous walks between the hotel and the Prophet's Mosque, especially as we wanted to pray as many prayers as we could within its vicinity, hungry for the multiplied reward. Jumping into a taxi, I kept reminding myself that Allah never lets down those who trust in Him. We were His servants travelling to the peace and security the early Muslims found in Madinah.

I arrived at the hotel's reception desk. After optimistically checking whether Google Maps might be off by a few crucial minutes – anything to shave off some of the dreaded walk under

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the Saudi Arabian sun – I asked the receptionist how long the walk actually was. She looked at me with furrowed brows, confused by my question, then pointed to the opposite entrance and said, 'It's right there. Literally a couple of minutes away.'

My eyes followed the direction of her finger and lo and behold, the Prophet's Mosque was right in front of the hotel entrance! In complete disbelief, I held up my phone for the receptionist to see the distance that Google Maps had shown me. She smiled and said, 'Oh, yes – for some reason, many customers have told us Google Maps show our hotel to be further away than it is.' She returned to her computer to complete our check-in. In slight shock, I looked away and gazed out at the gigantic umbrellas that Masjid an-Nabawi is renowned for. The receptionist interrupted my thoughts. 'Madam,' she said, 'I have upgraded your rooms free of charge. Your rooms are now larger and have a view of Masjid an-Nabawi. Enjoy your stay.'

My eyes began to fill with tears. In that moment, I knew my Lord had not only answered my du'a, but in the beautiful way that He is Al-Kareem, The Most Generous, He had given me more and better than what I had asked for. Such is Allah.

A week after returning to the UK from our Umrah trip, I attended an Islamic Qur'an reading in East London Mosque where I bumped into a friend.

'Aliyah, how was Umrah?' she asked, hugging me. I told her how easy and cost-effective it was to book one's Umrah without an agency – and then about our experience with the Madinah hotel. She listened to me with her eyes wide open, inspired by my du'a story; the sparkle of yearning to converse with her Lord and make du'a for all that her heart wanted was evident in her eyes. Then suddenly there was a shift. The pupils of her eyes contracted.

'Subhana'Allah [how free of any imperfection is Allah]!' she exclaimed. 'As an ummah [Islamic community], we've lost our understanding of what du'a is and how powerful it can be in our lives. We feel we can only make du'a at certain times and

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in certain places. But du'a can be made at any time. It doesn't need to be this long textbook script! Aliyah, we need to revive du'a in our lives! The community needs to know how amazing du'a is! We need to return to the understanding that du'a just needs to be heartfelt, specific and with a sound belief that Allah will respond in the absolute best way.'

I smiled and whispered, 'Don't tell anyone, but you know my second book—'

'Don't tell me it's about du'a!' she interrupted before I could finish my sentence.

'Yes, it's called *The Power of Du'a*,' I replied.

Dearest reader, du'a is often described as personal prayer. But I want you to know it is so much more than that. Du'a is a relationship between you and your Lord. It is personal communication with Allah that develops and nurtures the closest relationship you will ever experience in this dunya (the life of this world). It is you – in all the ways that you are limited, flawed and imperfect – calling upon The One who is Unlimited, with no flaws, Absolutely Perfect. It is you talking to Him, crying out to Him, complaining to Him and asking of Him all that your heart desires. It is you turning to Him and telling Him what you need. It is the sharing of your concerns with Him, because you know He Listens Attentively. It is asking Him to show you the way when you feel lost. It is you journeying through this life, needing and hoping for His Guidance, Ease, Blessings and Overflowing Abundant Mercy.

If you have experienced this type of relationship, then you have been blessed with one of the most precious riches of this world. If you are yet to know this kind of relationship, then get ready to experience the closest, most soothing, most fulfilling relationship you will ever encounter. This is du'a, and this is what du'a can become for you. I am so excited for you. If you are questioning whether this is possible for you as you recount your sins and many imperfections, then read what I am about to share very carefully – because it applies to every single one of us . . .

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Your Lord, Allah ('azza wa jal) wants to have a relationship with you regardless. Yes! The Creator of all that exists wants to have a relationship with you! What is my proof? My proof lies in the fact that Allah (subhanahu wa ta'ala) revealed ninety-nine of His Names to you and did not place a condition that you needed to be free of sin to know Him. Your Lord did not keep Himself concealed. He revealed who He is and how He interacts with His servants – and that includes you!

Thinking of this in human terms, when we want people to know us, we share things about ourselves with them – our personality, our likes and dislikes, experiences, who we are and most definitely our name. What does this mean? It means that in Allah's revealing to you ninety-nine of His Names, He wants you to know Him deeply. Again, in human terms, we understand that it is only through knowing someone that we can build a relationship with that person.

My dearest reader, Allah ('azza wa jal) wants you to know Him so that you may develop a close relationship with Him. He wants you to experience Him as you navigate the mountainous climb we call life. Allah has revealed Himself to you through His Names. And so du'a is your own human decision to invest in that relationship through interacting with His Names – developing your awareness of the One to whom you are speaking and building a foundation of faith of who He can become for you. This develops the closest bond with The Most Loving.

I invite you now to grab a cup of your favourite drink as I introduce you to du'a by deeply understanding who you are speaking to. Though Allah has ninety-nine Names and more, I will focus on only four that He chose to introduce to you simply and clearly, so they are easily accessible, as you will come to see. These Names are so special and so encompassing that your Lord has lovingly decreed that you be reminded of them every day – so that you may always remember who He is, can be and will be for you.

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Allow me to introduce you to your Beloved.

2

Your Need, His Mercy

Allah ('azza wa jal) says:

'My Mercy encompasses everything . . .'

Surah Al-Araf 7:156

Any powerful speech recorded in the history of humankind has survived the ages because of those to whom the message was directed. Du'a is no different. The importance of du'a will only ever be realised when we know who we are addressing. It is my hope that you will move away from du'a that is scripted, dry and performed, and instead move towards du'a that is raw, human, heartfelt and impromptu, because your tongue has become so accustomed to move in communication with your Lord. I hope, by Allah's Permission, that you realise du'a can be made in moments of joy and sadness; in moments of strength as well as when you feel weak; in moments where you feel both close and distant from your Rabb.

There is no better way to introduce you to Allah than the way He has introduced Himself through His Own Words. His Words have been preserved in the Qur'an (the Holy Book of Allah) for over 1,400 years, when they were first revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) in the cave of Hira. Allah ('azza wa jal) has

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made this easy to discover. We need not read far into His Book. In fact, opening the Qur'an at the very first page of the very first chapter, we find the most beautiful introduction to the Lord of the Worlds. It is in none other than Surah Fatiha, the chapter we coincidentally must recite in every raka'ah (unit of prayer) – a condition for its validity. I smile at this. It is almost as though Allah (subhanahu wa ta'ala) wants to consistently remind us of who He is, knowing that human nature is to forget, because He really does want us to have an exceptionally close relationship with Him.

So many lessons are taken from this first chapter of the Qur'an – which is in fact a du'a in and of itself. Aside from discovering the Names and Attributes of our Creator, we learn about the power of du'a and the beautiful relationship that ensues between servant and Lord.

In a hadith (narration), it is said:

> The Prophet (ﷺ) said: 'Allah Almighty said: I have divided prayer between Myself and My servant into two halves, and My servant shall have what he has asked for.' When the servant says: 'All praise is due to Allah the Lord of the worlds', Allah says: 'My servant has praised Me.' When he says: 'The Gracious, The Merciful', Allah says: 'My servant has exalted Me.' When he says: 'The Master of the Day of Judgement', Allah says: 'My servant has glorified Me and My servant has submitted to Me.' When he says: 'You alone we worship, You alone we ask for help', Allah says: 'This is between Me and My servant, and My servant will have what he has asked for.' When he says, 'Guide us to the straight path, the path of those whom You have favoured, not those who went astray', Allah says: 'This is for My servant, and My servant will have what he has asked for.'
>
> *Sahih Muslim*

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My dearest reader, on the first page of the Qur'an, in Surah Fatiha, Allah introduces us to four of His Names: Rabb (The Lord), Ar-Rahmaan (The Most Merciful), Ar-Raheem (The Especially Merciful) and Al-Malik (The Owner of all things). These four names were placed strategically at the beginning of the Qur'an and in the prayer by an intentional Creator.

As you read on, you will understand that your Lord made these names easily known to every human being regardless of their gender, age, race, status and intellect from a place of Affection and Love.

The first time I read the Qur'an was as a non-Muslim teenager. It was a translation of the Qur'an that also included the transliteration. I remember opening the Holy Book carefully to the very first page and instead of reading the English translation, with finger placed firmly under the transliteration, I attempted to read what I knew was the pronunciation of the Arabic words. Chapter 1, verse 1 of the Qur'an states 'Bismillahir Rahmanir Raheem', which is translated as 'In the name of Allah, The Most Merciful, The Especially Merciful.' This was my first introduction to God as revealed in the Islamic faith. Reading this first verse of the Qur'an was an unforgettable moment. It felt as though I was engaging with a sacred description of The Most High. These were not merely words. They were the most important adjectives I would come to know – ones that required me to hold them close in reverence and respect.

In that precise moment of reciting the Qur'an for the first time, I was transported to my childhood. There were memories of extra-curricular activities – piano, swimming and African dance lessons. My mother worked very hard to provide my younger brother and me with experiences she never had. She was a mother who went the extra mile, but she was terribly unhappy in her marriage to my father. Perhaps it was the differences in culture and expectations – she a fiery and passionate Sicilian woman and he a super-strict Nigerian man. My young

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eyes and ears sadly witnessed many disagreements, arguments and fights. As a little girl, I often tried to silence the noise by taking myself to the living room window of our two-bedroom flat on the second floor of a council estate in Poplar, East London.

Flicking the curtain netting over my shoulders, I would lean my arms on the windowsill and stare into one of my favourite spots. On the ground floor directly opposite was an extremely large shipping container that acted as a temporary mosque. I found it fascinating as I watched Bangladeshi men walk towards the door, flick their flip-flops off their feet and enter. Resting my head on my folded arms, I could see into the entrance of this makeshift mosque – a brightly carpeted room. I observed how the men would bow and prostrate themselves as they prayed. When they finished their prayers, they searched for their flip-flops amongst the small hill that had formed, and then walked back into the estate, and I would also retreat back to my bedroom. It was my aim as a child to catch this moment as much as I could, knowing this act of worship was repeated several times a day.

One day, when I was eight years old, my mother and father had one of their biggest fights. I ran to my bedroom, pausing only to grab my mother's shawl from her room. As I heard shouting and banging, I shut my bedroom door and threw the shawl outspread onto the ground. With tears falling down my cheeks, I fell onto the shawl and placed my head on the ground – imitating the prayer that I so loved to observe. In that very position, I cried out and said, 'God, make them stop! I need them to stop! Give us peace!' I kept repeating this as the shawl became wet with my tears. I felt that this position, though foreign to me personally, was the closest I could ever be to God and that right there at that precise moment, He heard me, and that He would respond. Even though this childhood memory faded over time, when I saw the transliteration and translation of the first verse of Surah Fatiha in front of me, I became aware

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that the memory still touched a deep place within my heart. This was a God who was introducing Himself to me as One who would be Kind, Compassionate and Merciful in all my moments of vulnerability.

Dearest reader, I am sure there have been times when you have felt completely out of your depth – needing relief, wanting ease, desperate to feel His Merciful Embrace. As I shared in my previous book, *Ramadan Reflections*, you are always in one of three states: you were either previously tested with a difficulty, or you are being tested now, or you will be tested in the future. And because we are always in one of these three states, we are always in need of Allah. We are in need of Him to help us cope as we stand in the eye of a storm, tired, battered by strong winds – not knowing how we'll ever emerge whole. We are in need of Him to cope with its aftermath as we recover and gather ourselves to go forward once again. And we are in need of Him to strengthen and fortify ourselves as we prepare for the next one.

Muslim or non-Muslim, young or old, man or woman, we are all human beings who experience need. It is in our nature to need, to reach out for help and to lean upon others. In the fast-paced nature of moving between all three states in the course of life – whether when studying, working, being in relationships with family and friends, alternating between sickness and good health, experiencing such joy you laugh so hard that your stomach hurts, or heartbreaking sadness that makes you cry so hard that your eyes feel old and worn – Allah knows we don't have time to figure out which of His ninety-nine Names is best to call upon. In moments of deep internal turmoil where we are brought to our knees, He has revealed to us the only Names we will ever require in our times of need.

Ar-Rahmaan is The All-Encompassing One, Absolutely Full of Mercy and Most Definitely Merciful. His Mercy is not limited to a time, place or type of creation. It touches everything and everyone, and is immediate. As if this was not enough, in this

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first verse of the Qur'an, Allah couples Ar-Rahmaan with Ar-Raheem. Ar-Raheem is The One who is Especially Merciful to those who believe in Him. Your Lord knows, when in a storm, that you will feel disorientated, which will affect your capacity to feel and think clearly. So, through His Mercy and Love, He has reminded you of His Names Ar-Rahmaan and Ar-Raheem. You recite them at the beginning of every surah (chapter) with the exception of Surah Tawbah. You say them before you start anything. You include them in your salah (prayer) whenever you recite Surah Fatiha.

Allah could have chosen some of His other Names in all of these instances. But He chose Names which describe His Mercy.

It is narrated in a hadith qudsi – Allah's Words as shared by the Prophet (ﷺ) – that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

> Allah made mercy into one hundred parts. He kept ninety-nine parts with Himself and sent down one part to the Earth. From that one part, the creation is merciful to each other, such that a horse raises its hoof over its child for fear of trampling it.

In another narration, the Prophet (ﷺ) said:

> Allah has kept ninety-nine parts of Mercy to show to His servants on the Day of Resurrection.
>
> *Sahih Bukhari* and *Sahih Muslim*

Your Lord chose His Mercy, because He knows and fully understands that from the cradle until the grave, you will be in one of those three states that will always place you in a state of vulnerability and in need of Him. And He wishes for you to find Him to be Understanding, Affectionate, Tender and Merciful. These constant reminders can only be from a Loving Lord who never wants you to forget that He is here for you through it all, and

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